

The Pearl Doctor

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this phase of the matter. She was calmly scrutinizing the dealer. There was no disputing his statement. These pearls certainly were not decaying pearls, as she had noticed immediately.

"Come in and look at them any time you wish," concluded the dealer, half mockingly. "This is an established place. You will always find us here. But I don't think you will find the pearls here, not long. Such a bargain is too good not to be snapped up quickly."

Clare had said nothing in reply, for she had already placed a "shadow" on Wheaton. It did not surprise her, therefore, later in the day to learn that among his recent callers had been a man who represented the Fifth Avenue dealer. A hurried telephone message from the "shadow" later in the day informed her that Wheaton had been seen entering the store.

SINCE it was known to every one that she was working on the case she decided to take the risk of entering the store again herself to make sure whether the alleged replica had been sold.

"Ah, madame," greeted Margot, recognizing her. "You see, it is as I said! You are too late. The beautiful replica has been sold. And you would nevaire guess the buyer."

"No?" queried Clare.

"Nevaire," responded Margot.

"It could not have been Mr. Wheaton?" she asked abruptly.

Margot shot a swift and suspicious glance at her. "Then you are really a detective?" he asked. "Yes, it was Monsieur Wheaton, who lost the old original. The pearls have fascinated him and he now pays for the copy as much as he paid for the original, plus the sixty per cent duty, but the ten per cent on unset jewels and something more to pay me for the trouble of assembling them and the workmanship on the copy. Ah, but it was a bargain even at that!"

The man was baffling. Clare could not figure it out, and beat an orderly retreat. Having nothing else to do just at present she decided to drop in at Lawson's laboratory.

"I think if we took a little walk up the Avenue it would help to clear your mind," he suggested. "I can see you have been brooding too much over this case. Forget it for awhile."

They had stopped in their stroll before the window of a book shop and were looking over the display of the latest fiction.

"Billy," exclaimed Clare suddenly, "regarding books, let's go in and see what they have on pearls. Pearls are on my mind just now much more than fiction."

The clerk after a long search brought out a book. Lawson insisted on paying for it, and they continued their walk.

"We're only a few blocks from home," remarked the girl, as they neared the Park. "You've been so kind to me today, Billy; won't you come in for a cup of tea?"

"I was only waiting for an invitation," he smiled.

A few minutes later they were chatting cozily in Miss Kendall's little sitting room.

"Billy," his hostess confided over the tea caddy, "it is the strangest case I have ever worked on. First comes a murder that looks like a suicide. Now comes a replica that looks like an original. From that glass tube that I discovered you proved scientifically what I had already arrived at intuitively, that it was a murder and not a suicide. Now it is up to me to figure out the rest of the problem."

She was turning over the leaves of the book on pearls which she and Lawson had purchased. Suddenly

pausing, she cried: "Listen! Let me read this about the death and diseases of pearls." Clare read:

Pearls can and do decay if exposed to such influences as will destroy the calcareous or animal layers of the pearl. Hence the many sentimental stories of the dying of pearls. It is known that they have decayed in safe deposit boxes if in contact with wool or the colored velvet of jewel cases. The "skin" seems to be affected.

Experts are puzzled to find an explanation for the cause of the disease, but it is probably a form of starvation. It is as though the pearls find nourishment in the life that is seated in the skin of beautiful women, for which reason jewelers maintain that pearls must be worn on the bare skin.

There are women in Paris who have established tremendous reputations as successful pearl doctors or pearl mothers. Often old necklaces need a young, soft, warm, healthy, clear-skinned beauty to save them from decay and bring them back to beautiful life. The peculiar and well-advertised virtue of some of these pearl doctors attracts the attention of owners of decaying pearls who engage them with delightful results.

Clare snapped the book shut, rose to her feet and began pacing the floor. Dr. Lawson regarded her with undisguised admiration. It was hard to sit still and in silence, but better so than to interrupt her, he thought. What a girl she was, as she paced to and fro in the little room, feminine in every inch of her figure yet with what an athletic, prehensile, even muscular, intellect.

She stopped, caught his eye, and her face changed instantly. "Excuse me, Billy," she murmured, "but when I get deeply absorbed in a case I can't help forgetting other things."

She dropped down on the davenport by him. He moved closer.

"No, no, Billy," she laughed, disengaging her hand, "not here. Don't interrupt a clue by a proposal now. You know, Billy—Doctor Lawson—how much I think of you—as a friend. How can I ever thank you for suggesting that little walk? I believe it has been the means of putting me on the right track at last."

WITHOUT changing a degree of the ardor of his glance that she had checked, but leaning forward now with his chin on his hand, as he rested his elbow on his knee, near her, he rapidly studied her flushed face.


"How?" he asked simply. "What do you mean?"

"Billy," she said talking rapidly, putting her hand on his arm and meeting his eyes steadily as she announced, "the Valderome pearls were never stolen at all."

"Never stolen at all?" he repeated incredulously.

"No. Think a minute. Why pay a sixty per cent duty when there was a cheaper way of bringing them into the country? Again, why buy decaying antiques at all, at even bargain prices, unless they could be restored? The book has just told us the scientific way in which they could be restored."

"Now, what more natural, then, for a millionaire like Wheaton to do than to hear of or think out a way to kill all the birds with one stone? Here was Louise De Voe, beautiful, well-formed, fascinating, a girl who had captivated him. He would try the pearls on her. She wore them once, we know. He would engage her as the 'pearl mother' or 'pearl doctor' to restore them. More than that, he would know that he himself had not a ghost of a chance of smug-



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